

Review of *The Indian Queen*

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MONTEZUMA RIDES AGAIN

Isleworth Baroque's performance of Purcell's 1695 semi opera "The Indian Queen", his last if "The Tempest" is (as some scholars maintain) by his brother Daniel, saw a welcome return to our greatest composer after last year's - admittedly enjoyable - defection to Italy, and was a logical follow-up to the workshop held earlier. As in other works in this genre, Henry was happy to re-use music from his other compositions where appropriate, so the choir found themselves singing the final chorus from "King Arthur" again to different words, and the orchestra played a dance already familiar to them from "The Fairy Queen". If we were denied the pomp and splendour of the preparations for sacrifice in Act V, the staging this year being minimal, the wealth of new music from a composer at the height of his powers was compensation enough, as in the superb chorus "All dismal sounds thus on these off'rings wait" from that very scene. As usual, the cast remained totally committed, however absurd the story - this time about the amorous machinations of ancient Mexicans and Incas. They only let their hair down in Daniel Purcell's Masque at the end, although their evident enjoyment of lighter moments before that communicated itself to the audience, as in the hissing of the snakes to accompany the singing of green-masked Envy and his companions.

The choral singing was first-rate and the orchestra fit for purpose in general, with some nice baroque ingredients. Gerald Place forsook his gamba to direct the chorus when Helena Brown needed her hands to play the harpsichord. Recorders in tandem added colourful obbligati to "Why should man quarrel?" and "The joys of wedlock soon are past" (this latter sung with the camp it deserved). It is always invidious to mention names among the many soloists, but I particularly enjoyed Sally Pinney's lovely rondo "I attempt from love's sickness to fly", the singing of the two new counter-tenors Rohan D'Souza and Mark Fletcher (in the temporary absence of Neville Bayross), Jacqui Silverstone's accurate intonation, and Janet Oates, fearsome in speech (as general Traxalla) and tuneful in song. But there were some very good newcomers and familiar stalwarts. The professionals took up "La Calisto" after Isleworth broke the ice last year, so will they take the hint from this "Indian Queen"?

*Alan Gibbs*

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